

Farewell Remarks of FTC Chairwoman Edith Ramirez
Washington, DC
January 17, 2017

What can I possibly say as I approach my last day as Chairwoman of the Federal Trade Commission? I can sum it very simply: It has been the honor of a lifetime to lead this agency.

I want to take this opportunity to personally thank each and every one of you for your dedicated service to the American public and to share a few thoughts about my time here and what this unique institution represents to me.

As I think back about my tenure at the Commission, I cannot help but think what a special privilege it was for me to have served as the head of the FTC during our 100th anniversary – to celebrate the agency’s storied history as a beacon of bipartisanship and expert analysis that dates all the way back to the agency’s origins during the Progressive era. I am honored that I could be a part of it, and I know that President Wilson and Justice Brandeis would be proud of today’s FTC and see it as embodying their highest ambitions.

As I stand here today, it seems to me that the vision they had for the FTC – as an agency that would use reason and bipartisanship to ensure a fair and honest marketplace for consumers and businesses alike, regardless of size or wealth – has been more than realized.

I often think about the Commission’s long history – and especially the way the foundation on which the FTC was built continues to undergird what we do today.

The Progressive Era leaders who created the FTC did so with the idea that it would be first and foremost a robust law enforcer. But they also saw us an agency of experts who would seek to understand changing markets and business practices and be thought leaders on emerging issues. They conceived of an agency that could keep pace with economic change, while being a model for public policy development.

I have also often thought about a conversation I had with former Chairman Bill Kovacic early on in my tenure as Chairwoman. He emphasized that “great institutions reflect an accumulation of effort over decades and thrive because leaders keep their eye on the future and are not guided by a desire for immediate acclaim.” I think he is absolutely right.

The FTC is a great institution because of the vision and accomplishments of prior leaders – Democrats and Republicans alike. Indeed, most of what we do today can be traced back to initiatives that long preceded me.

Chairman Pitofsky saw early on that we needed to improve our understanding of how new technology was reshaping the world around us. During his tenure, the Commission held workshops on protecting consumers in the high tech global marketplace and submitted a report to Congress highlighting key privacy principles. On his watch, the Commission brought its first pay-for-delay cases and conducted the agency’s first remedy study, efforts that we are building on today.

Chairmen Muris and Majoras both took his efforts further. Under Chairman Muris, the FTC established the National Do Not Call Registry, an award-winning initiative that has become an invaluable part of our flagship telemarketing fraud program. The FTC also studied healthcare provider markets in a way that set us up for our recent successes in that sector. Chairman Muris also firmly established the agency’s data security program. That work continued under Chairman Majoras. Under her leadership, the Commission brought additional data security cases and expanded the FTC’s role in that area by creating the Division of Privacy and Identity Protection.

Chairman Kovacic led a comprehensive effort to prepare the agency to meet the challenges of the next century, including enhancing the FTC’s international coordination and

cooperation efforts in a globalized economy. Chairman Leibowitz put pay-for-delay deals under a microscope, helping to set the stage for our notable Supreme Court win in the Actavis case, among others. He hired our first Chief Technologist and emphasized the importance of consumer privacy and data security in our fast-paced digital world.

I have sought to build on this record while planting strong seeds for the Chairmen – and women – who will follow in future years.

With your incredible talent and hard work, we have served the American public and advanced our dual mission.

We have shined a light on some of the most difficult and complicated issues facing American consumers and markets, ranging from the healthcare sector to energy markets to the sharing economy. We have also studied native and behavioral advertising, debt buyers, patent assertion entities, and our own remedies with an eye toward improving agency effectiveness. And we have done much, much more.

Just as our predecessors would have wanted, we took on some of the toughest cases and held so many formidable companies – often represented by the nation’s most preeminent law firms – accountable to their customers. These include giants in the technology, telecommunications, and pharmaceutical industries to one of the world’s largest auto manufacturers and the largest multi-level marketer.

What stands out most as I look back is the incredible impact that our work has had on everyday Americans in every community around this country:

- Like the 500,000 consumers who paid thousands of dollars for a new VW car, only to find out it was the product of sham “clean diesel” advertising;

- the millions of people forced to pay thousands of dollars more than they should have to get the vital health care or medicines they need;
- the customers of T-Mobile and AT&T who were bamboozled by the unauthorized third party charges on their phone bill;
- the people who paid thousands of dollars to an apparent cancer charity, only to discover later that it was fake; and
- the people who lost their information to a data breach or had their identity stolen and did not know what to do.

It is our work – your work – that ensures that companies stay on the right side of the law and that American consumers reap the benefits of a competitive marketplace. Your work has ensured that students who were deceived about their higher education and career prospects received redress; that hospital and drug markets stay competitive; that deceived cell phone users are compensated for the bogus charges on their phone bill. And it is your work shutting down frauds and halting anticompetitive deals that prevents countless other people from being victimized or paying inflated prices.

The everyday Americans touched by your work are young and old, and cross all economic and social groups. They are white, black, Latino, Asian, and from all of America's many immigrant communities. They are disabled Americans and members of the military.

By helping to engender the trust and confidence of these everyday Americans in the marketplace, and expanding our knowledge on the crucial issues facing the economy, you have made major contributions that will help keep the world's largest markets innovative and thriving.

And for this I have all of you to thank. To everyone – from our exceptional attorneys and economists, as well as our growing number of technologists, to our amazing administrative and

technical professionals and support staff – it has been my privilege to work with you over these past years. This is an incredibly special place because of you and the mission that you so tirelessly pursue every day.

It is impossible to acknowledge the individuals who have helped me – day in and day out – to meet the demands of leading this high performing agency, but indulge me while I mention just a few.

Let me start by acknowledging the extraordinary leadership of Jessica Rich and Debbie Feinstein who set a vision for our dual mission and executed on that vision with an abundance of law enforcement investigations and actions on consumers’ behalf. Jessica has overseen a crushing workload as Director of our Bureau of Consumer Protection, including many high level and complex cases that have put hundreds of millions of dollars back into consumers’ pockets, as well as shutting down pernicious scams up and down the country. Debbie has led the Competition Bureau in a notable series of litigations and investigations that have led to huge victories for competition, getting her own feet wet as a litigator and trial attorney in the process.

I also need to acknowledge Jon Nuechterlein who through his intelligence, wisdom, and wit – not to mention incredible writing skills – is to me the epitome of the ideal general counsel.

And I want to thank my string of superb academics who led our Bureau of Economics and sacrificed their university sabbaticals to work for us – Ginger Jin, Francine LaFontaine, and Marty Gaynor. It has been critical to our mission to have your keen insights from an economic perspective to guide our thinking.

I also want to thank Andy Gavil, Marina Lao, and Tara Koslov who through their thoughtful and enthusiastic leadership have kept our Office of Policy Planning in the news with its many workshops and advocacies promoting competition in many sectors of our economy.

I want to thank Randy Tritell and our Office of International Affairs for keeping the agency front and center in the greater global sphere of antitrust and consumer protection.

And Jeanne Bumpus and our entire congressional team for helping Congress understand our mission and the vital work we do, helping ensure our budgets stayed in line with our mission despite difficult fiscal times. And, of course, so much of our standing with Congress as well as more broadly comes from the great press our work receives, and for that I want to thank Justin Cole and his leadership of our terrific Public Affairs Office.

I also want to express my gratitude to our Secretary, Don Clark, for his guidance and assistance with the functioning of the Commission; no one knows the “ins and outs” of Commission practice the way he does. Thanks also to Katie Brin, and her predecessor, Peter Miller for ensuring our internal privacy policies match the guidance we provide to companies. And I want to thank Kevin Williams for all his efforts to ensure we truly are an agency of equal opportunity and workplace inclusion.

I want to acknowledge all of the regional directors – you and your offices are not only on the frontlines, you are the engines behind so many of our law enforcement successes.

I also want to thank our executive director, David Robbins, and his entire team for ensuring that we have the infrastructure and support necessary to accomplish our mission and for overseeing so much – from our successful move to Constitution Center, to our clean financial audits to IT improvements, to name just a few. Thanks too to Roslyn Mazer, our Inspector General, for her assistance in ensuring the integrity and efficacy of the agency’s work.

I also have to acknowledge our Chief Technologist Lorrie Cranor and her predecessors – Steve Bellovin, Latanya Sweeney, and Ashkan Soltani. Their contributions have enabled us to

stay on top of the latest technological developments and policy ideas, and their presence has been integral to our role as thought leaders in the privacy and data security arenas.

I also want to thank all of our senior executives and managers who helped set our course in not only law enforcement but also policy, research, education, and the international arena. I could not have asked for a better team.

I must of course also acknowledge my terrific and dedicated fellow Commissioners – all of the Commissioners with whom I have worked throughout my tenure, but especially my current colleagues, Maureen Ohlhausen and Terrell McSweeney. I know of few others who have such a deep regard for the FTC as an institution as Maureen does. And I admire in particular Terrell’s energy and commitment to ensuring that the FTC is truly an agency of the 21st century.

Finally, I want to take a moment to thank my personal staff who have often worked around-the-clock to advance the work of the Commission. I want to acknowledge each of you for the vital role you played in helping me to manage the broad range of work of the FTC and for all of your contributions to so many agency accomplishments over the past several years.

Let me start with Heather Hipsley, my chief of staff, who has dedicated herself to helping me execute my vision – and on occasion pulled me back when I might have been overly ambitious. Monica Carter, who has been with me since day one. I simply could not have functioned without you, Monica.

And, of course, my wonderful team of advisors, paralegals, and other administrative support. There are too many to name – many former advisors and paralegals are also here today – but let me mention a few. Janis Kestenbaum – a friend of more than 20 years and my first advisor; Jon Nathan, my longstanding competition advisor, who has been with me the longest;

and the rest of my current team – Shaundra Watson, Henry Su, and Kristen Anderson.¹ I also want to acknowledge Katia Barron, my honors paralegal, who never seems to go home and is always ready to jump in to help me on any task.

One of the most difficult things about leaving the Commission is that I have come to know so many of you – so many exceptional people who push themselves every single day to do the right thing for America’s consumers. It has been an honor and a privilege to be here and to have worked with all of you.

Let me share just one last thought that makes leaving the FTC a little less difficult. This institution is larger than any one of us individually; it is the team spirit and sense of mission that allows the agency to evolve and succeed. Knowing all of you as I do, I have no doubt that when I leave, I will leave the Commission in excellent hands, with Commissioners Ohlhausen and McSweeney leading the way, and that the fight for honest, fair, and competitive markets will continue unabated. I wish you all the best for the coming months and years ahead and know you will achieve many more successes as you write the next chapter of FTC history.

As President Obama recently stated in an interview, “[A]t the end of the day, we’re part of a long-running story. We just try to get our paragraph right.” I hope that, during the time I was at the FTC, we got our paragraph right.

Thank you.

¹ Thanks also to the following members and former members of my office: Kati Daffan, Lisa Kimmel, Tara Koslov, Evan Zullow, Pablo Zylberglait, Alyssa O’Connor, Jacob Reisberg, Monsura Sirajee, Melody Martinez, and Cathy Norris.